



'The work of masculine fingers': the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry, 1918–1955

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Embroidery as a feminising activity for men, as a sign of emasculation and effeminacy that also insinuates sexual inversion, although generally overlooked by historians was widely deliberated in early twentieth century Britain. Operating between 1918 and 1955 the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry was perhaps the most successful and high-profile scheme that aimed to help disabled combatants, returning from the First World War, back to employment through the small-scale production of domestic and luxury textiles marketed to middle class and aristocratic consumers. Its contribution to the modern revival of interest in embroidery is clear from its widespread promotion in newspapers and women's magazines, its relationship with manufacturers such as Pearsall's sewing threads and Weldon's mail-order sewing patterns, its inclusion in major exhibitions of embroidery in the period and the several major commissions it garnered until after the Second World War. This brief analysis of its history, made possible by the recent discovery of a small archive of its papers and a number of surviving embroideries, affords some insight into how masculine identity and the disabled body have operated as active rather than passive agents in design history. This article, although providing a basic overview of this business, also offers an interrogation of the interrelationship of masculinity, disability, craft and interwar modernity in Britain that draws upon design history, gender and sexuality theory and disability studies.

Keywords: disability–embroidery–First World War–home craft–masculinity–philanthropy

Introduction

On the morning of the 9 May 1927, almost a decade after the end of the First World War, King George V and Queen Mary left Buckingham Palace to attend the private view of an embroidery exhibition. Arriving at the home of Sir Alfred and Lady Mond, at 35 Lowndes Square, at 11 o'clock, the King and Queen both recorded in their private diaries their interest and delight at viewing embroideries 'done by disabled soldiers' after which they spent the rest of the morning talking to the seventy or so men in the Mond's 'pretty garden.'¹ The exhibition had been organised to promote the work of the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry, which had been established in 1918 to provide training and employment for men who had survived the war but had returned with such serious injuries that they were prevented from returning to their previous jobs. The exhibition, which had been an annual event since 1919, was supported by other members of the Royal household, wealthy industrialists, entrepreneurs and businessmen, museum curators, textile experts and amateur enthusiasts, as well as society and celebrity figures. As the King and Queen walked around the garden each man was presented to them by Chief Air-Marshall Sir Hugh Trenchard: the King asked the men 'about their experiences in the war, while the Queen talked about their home life.'² 'Both were frankly astonished at the fineness and excellence of the needlework done by the men,' and that everything was made by hand and at home.'³ 'Softest satin and coarse canvas' were decorated 'with beautiful stitchery,' each item possessing both 'luxury and utility,' and there was, the Queen thought, evidence that the quality was improving each year.'⁴

On display were regimental colours, sheriff and guild banners, embroideries for fashionable dress and historic furniture, ecclesiastical designs, such as the especially commissioned altar frontal for Goldsborough church in Yorkshire associated with the Lascelles family into which the King and Queen's only daughter, Princess Mary, had recently married, and other commissions for original designs and copies after antique needlework, tapestries and maps.⁵ Many of the men were in bathchairs and those who could not stand for long were seated in the garden (**Fig. 1**). One man had been wheeled the whole way from Balham that morning in the hope of seeing the King and Queen. Unlike in previous years the Royal visit attracted extraordinary media attention.⁶ There was interest in what the Queen wore ('The Queen was dressed entirely in grey, with a grey toque swathed in pastel shades'; 'The Queen wore a dress of one of the newest fabrics, in crinkled and spotted design, not unlike lizard-skin leather, and a pale grey coat') and in what she bought (a 'fine canvas perambulator cushion...decorated with a design of wooden soldiers and little trees,' two 'old oak stools, covered with petit point, a dainty little dress, a set of reins, and other toys for her granddaughter Elizabeth').⁷ And to mark the occasion, the first exhibition to be held in his elegant Belgravia home, Sir Alfred Mond presented the Queen with a gift, 'an exquisite little casket in black and gold Spanish work on white silk background inspired by the embroideries brought to England by Queen Catherine of Aragon and taught by her to the ladies of the court,' made by a man 'who had lost both legs' in the war and who had travelled from Suffolk the day before to attend the presentation (**Fig. 2**).⁸ The Queen 'was greatly struck by the delicacy of the work – so fine, indeed, that it was difficult to realise it as the work of masculine fingers.'⁹

The Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry was one of a number of charity schemes founded in the wake of the First World War, which aimed to rescue severely disabled veterans from unemployability, impoverishment and destitution. Like many schemes initiated during and after the war it was not wholly unusual in its employment of a craft traditionally associated with Victorian notions of 'the feminine ideal.' However, other similar charitable ventures that settled on the production of textiles focused principally on weaving or fabric printing. The Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry was exceptional in its focus on embroidery. And although much has been written about the significance of needlework in women's history, such as the role of sewing as a form of artisanal, sweated and immaterial labour, as a form of 'creative and interpretative consumption,'¹⁰ and as a mean to inculcate 'the feminine ideal,'¹¹ outside the odd perfunctory reference in military or textile history there is little, if any, accessible research on the embroidery produced by disabled ex-servicemen or indeed men in general.¹² If, as feminist historians have shown, the experience of sewing was both compulsory and subjugatory for women but could, conversely and even perversely, offer them a sense of agency or means to subversion, what did it mean for a man to embroider?¹³ Embroidery produced by men has gone completely unexamined.

The men of the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry were taught and supervised by a generation of women imbued with the Victorian ideal of the 'angel in the house,' but what of their own subjectivity and sense of gender and sexual identity in the context of wartime notions of masculinity, a triumvirate of aggression, virility and heroism that seemed incontrovertible even when faced with the horrors of total war.¹⁴ Since the turn-of-the-century ideas of hypermasculinity, male bonding and blood sacrifice had been steadily supplanting Victorian notions of chivalric 'manliness.'¹⁵ However, for many, especially those affected by physical and psychological injury and afflicted with life-long impairment, the war

proved to be emasculating; they returned ‘*unmen*’ in Sandra Gilbert’s memorable phrase.¹⁶ This could only have been exacerbated by then having to make a living with needle and thread. Furthermore, how did such ex-servicemen navigate the steadfast cultural associations of sewing as a feminising activity for men and as a sign of emasculation and effeminacy that also insinuated sexual inversion. That needle skills were ‘natural to women’ and ‘unnatural in men’ had become ‘a crucial aspect of patriarchal ideology’ in the nineteenth century.¹⁷ Embroidery as the embodiment of a passive and subordinate feminine stereotype was further employed by the new science of sexology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as a tacit marker of the male sexual invert, or homosexual.¹⁸

However, if as R.W. Connell has suggested, ‘gender is not fixed in advance of social interaction, but is constructed in interaction,’ a study of the Disabled Soldiers’ Embroidery Industry affords some insight into the social and cultural production of masculinity as a subject position relational to femininity and not necessarily its binary opposite.¹⁹ Limiting our reading of embroidery as the embodiment of a fixed and essentialised femininity serves only to obscure the realities of embroidery’s history and serves to perpetuate rather than overturn gendered readings of design. Indeed, as the historians Michael Roper and John Tosh have cautioned, such essentialist conceptualisations of gender often means that the subjective experiences of men go unexplored.²⁰ Furthermore, if the Disabled Soldiers’ Embroidery Industry prompts us to reconsider the masculine subject, what, then, did it mean for a man who had no legs, or who had lost a hand or fingers, to embroider? Rosemarie Garland Thomson has contended that the disabled body became ‘a repository for social anxieties about [such] troubling concerns as vulnerability, control, and identity,’ if she is right what, then, lay behind the façade of stoicism, cheerfulness and gratitude that the men of this organisation frequently evinced?²¹ And further, if masculinity and disability have operated ‘in conflict with each other’ because ‘disability is associated with being dependent and helpless whereas masculinity is associated with being powerful and autonomous’ how do we understand the men of this organisation beyond their embodiment of a crisis in masculine self-identification and how can we explain this organisation’s success and longevity beyond the ‘guilt-inducing symbolism of badly wounded men’?²²

If, as the extensive press coverage of the 1927 exhibition shows, the novelty and incongruity of the male needleworker proved no less as striking as the spectacle of aristocratic benevolence, why does the Disabled Soldiers’ Embroidery Industry seem so marginal? By this time, following almost ten successful years of operating the organisation was employing close to one hundred men, for whom it had ‘become a source of pleasure as well as a source of income’ and it was widely noted that ‘in several cases the health of the workers has visibly improved.’²³ As a business it remained relatively modest, training no more than four or five hundred men with an estimated annual turnover of around £800 at its peak, yet it was one of the most high profile charities of the period. Its contribution to the ‘modern craze’ for needlework in the interwar years is clear from its inclusion in major exhibitions and the several prestigious commissions it was awarded, including the ecclesiastical embroideries for the private chapel at Buckingham Palace, St. George’s Memorial Church at Ypres, and for the Cunard White Star Limited liner, RMS *Queen Mary*. They also received commissions from outside Britain through the imperial and colonial networks of patrons and customers.²⁴ Aside from a few cursory references in studies of textile history, and more recently in accounts of the First World War, the Disabled Soldiers’ Embroidery Industry appears to be all but obliterated from the historical record.²⁵ This article, therefore, aims to trace for the first time

the organisation's origins and achievements, in navigating embroidery's complex associations not just with gender but also with class and national identity and to reconsider its significance in terms of what it can tell us about two largely neglected subjects in design history – masculinity and disability.

Poverty and embroidery

Over a quarter of million combatants returned from the war with debilitating and permanently life-changing injuries.²⁶ State support, in terms of employment, retraining and even basic welfare, for such men was ad-hoc and fragmentary and charity organisations quickly set up, extended or transformed existing schemes to take in disabled ex-servicemen. The parsimonious response of the Government resulted in little actual provision outside a diminutive statutory pension. This was issued by a specially created Ministry of Pensions and calculated not in relation to a veteran's ability to return to his previous employment but in regard to the nature and severity of his disablement. From the outset the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry aimed to offer support only to men who were in receipt of no less than seventy per cent of the state pension. If a disabled man's pension was twenty-seven shillings per week, it was estimated that he could earn at least another ten shillings making embroidery.²⁷ Even though war veterans redirected existing charitable resources away from the civilian disabled in their own favour – what they found was the prolongation of Victorian benevolent interest in handicrafts as a mode of design tied to issues of poverty and morality, discipline and self-improvement.²⁸ Disability and design already existed, then, in a dialogue extending outward from the networks of Victorian cultural philanthropy. Indeed, in her study of disability in Britain since the eighteenth century Anne Borsay has suggested that interwar efforts to employ the war wounded 'where statutory commitment was minimal and voluntary effort converged on traditional trades that were marginal to the economy' seemed to collapse the concepts of disability and craft into one another.²⁹

Although by 1916 statistics drawn from the Government's Employment Bureaux showed that forty-two per cent of demobilised men 'return[ed] to their former occupations' nearly ten per cent remained unfit for work or training schemes due to permanent injuries and it was feared that amid the lack of support that such disabled ex-servicemen would drift into 'obtaining his living semi-begging, or even begging or gravitating towards the workhouse.'³⁰ By the end of the war anxiety surrounding the welfare of the disabled soldier edged dangerously toward national panic already beyond the resolve of medical or legislative intervention.³¹ Craftwork had long been deployed to occupy the sick, poor and disenfranchised and as the war developed and expanded fields such as orthopaedics and psychiatry so too did it give craft a new purpose as occupational therapy.³² In its promise of the acquisition of new skills, moderate physical exertion and pleasure in work, sedentary craftwork seemed applicable to almost any type of patient even those suffering from the newly diagnosed psychological injuries.³³

The Royal family, who had turned increasingly to civil life as their constitutional powers diminished in the nineteenth century, played an especially important role in the wartime charity surge and had long been associated with the patronage of craft industries.³⁴ Queen Victoria's daughters, in particular, had been prominent in the late nineteenth century cultural

philanthropy movement and extended their concerns for the poor to embrace the war maimed.³⁵ In 1872 the Queen's third daughter Helena, who became Princess Christian of Schleswig-Holstein after her marriage in 1866 and was subsequently known as Princess Christian, was appointed inaugural President of the Royal School of Art Needlework (the Royal School of Needlework from 1876), which had been established expressly 'to supply suitable employment for poor gentlewomen.'³⁶ During the war it was the Royal School of Needlework who provided many of the teachers of embroidery to the numerous convalescent schemes in hospitals and asylums. Princess Christian's youngest daughter, Princess Marie-Louise, became the inaugural President of the charity Friends of the Poor and under whose auspices she helped establish the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry. Several of Queen Victoria's other grandchildren played prominent roles in the organisation. Lady Irene Mountbatten, the wife of the Marquess of Carisbrooke, son of Queen Victoria's youngest daughter Princess Beatrice, was Chairman of the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry from its inception, and Princess Beatrice's only daughter, Victoria Eugénie who had become Queen of Spain in 1906, was one of the organisation's principal patrons.

Charities, church guilds and concerned individuals from all over the country seemed to come out of nowhere to teach handicrafts to wounded soldiers. Medical reaction to the casual teaching of crafts in hospitals and asylums as a means of rehabilitation was conflicted and often critical of the *laissez-faire* attitudes in organisation and delivery and of the negligible results.³⁷ Not long into the war voluntary organisations, such as Friends of the Poor, began to take an increasing interest in the plight of the disabled soldier. The Friends of the Poor had been founded in 1911 by Annie Collin, a farmer's daughter from Essex who had come to London at the end of the nineteenth century to dedicate herself to charitable work. Starting with the personal support of Princess Marie Louise, capital of £600 and a two-roomed office in Belgravia's Ebury Street, the core objective of Friends of the Poor was to 'bridge the gap between the rich and the deserving poor.'³⁸ By 1915 they were operating a toy-making workshop for married men from poor families. They then established a 'Disabled Soldiers' Aid Committee,' comprising twenty-five helpers and forty-two hospital visitors many of whom were men, and began considering 'possible work in [a] textile industry.'³⁹ By 1918 the Disabled Soldiers' Aid Committee had 11,371 men on its books and began its first 'home schemes' such as an envelope-making industry.

The Friends of the Poor was, in fact, a splinter group from Revd Wilson Carlile's Church Army, an evangelical Anglican organisation established in the 1880s, which encouraged middle-class and aristocratic women possessed of Christian virtue, who desired to help the poor, to descend into the precincts of London's poverty: '[to] enter sympathetically into the suffering of others in order to diminish it.'⁴⁰ Annie Collin and Princess Marie Louise had met in 1900 whilst working for a branch of the Church Army known as Friends of the Elderly and Gentlefolk's Help. Shocked by the new depths of poverty and suffering that the war had brought, they offered their services to hospitals, where they found many wounded men 'managed to pass the time with embroidery or wool work.'⁴¹ Collin had established successful needlework initiatives for women and girls before the war and it seemed practical to expand these to take in injured ex-servicemen. They decided to 'help to develop this form of occupational therapy, and place a financial value on it, thus enabling the men to feel that, though incapacitated from normal active work, they still could be breadwinners and contribute to the upkeep of the home.'⁴²

Princess Marie Louise's friend the actor and artist Ernest Thesiger, himself an admired and accomplished embroiderer, had around the same time, whilst visiting a friend in hospital, 'found men busily making needlework horrors' and it occurred to him 'that they would be better employed copying some really good designs.'⁴³ In November 1917, Thesiger wrote directly to the Ministry of Pensions suggesting a training scheme to teach disabled soldiers to copy and mend old needlework.⁴⁴ The London War Pensions Committee considered Thesiger's proposal, for a scheme of 'Needlework for discharged soldiers', along with a similar 'appliqué embroidery' scheme by Walter Taylor, a master weaver made redundant when the Morris & Co. tapestry workshop at Merton Abbey closed at the start of war.⁴⁵ Other unsolicited proposals that came to the Committee included a national scheme of craftwork for disabled soldiers from the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society and the Art Workers' Guild; George Frampton's proposal of a tapestry weaving workshop; a proposal for an 'Empire Guild of Handicraft' by P. Wylie Davidson of Glasgow School of Art; for a utopian craft settlement in Sapperton, Gloucestershire, from the architect and designer Ernest Gimson; and a scheme for training disabled ex-servicemen in stained glass by Edinburgh-based designer Douglas Strachan. The Committee also heard from several organisations already providing disabled ex-servicemen with teaching and materials, such as Grace Kimmins's Chailey Heritage Craft School in Sussex, the Hampshire House Workshops in Hammersmith, London, and Harry Peach's Dryad Handicrafts in Leicester. However, a proposal from the Design and Industries Association, received in February 1918, made explicit that the Government needed to avoid the 'philanthropic taint' of the Victorian amateur handicraft movement.⁴⁶ In the end the Ministry formed a 'National Advisory Committee for Craft Training for Disabled Soldiers,' chaired by Henry Wilson, the architect, designer and President of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, but like other Government initiatives, such as the King's National Roll, this proved of little impact.⁴⁷

In January 1918, pressing the Committee for a response, Thesiger suggested that if an embroidery workshop was set up soon that it could be included in the forthcoming large display of disabled soldiers' handicrafts to be held in London that coming May.⁴⁸ The embroidery workshop proposal was, at this point, rejected by the Committee but Thesiger's projected scheme did serve as part motivation in the formation of the 'National Advisory Committee.'⁴⁹ Thesiger later recalled that although his idea failed to attract official backing he was made aware that '[a]t that time 'The Friends of the Poor' were visiting hospitals & giving the men simple bits of work to do. So I went to them & suggested that they should join forces with me & provide the patients with worthwhile designs. They took up the idea with enthusiasm and from that small beginning was started 'The Disabled Soldiers Embroidery Industry' which, after forty years, still functions & thrives. So successful was it that the ministry of pensions relented & gave us a much-needed grant of money.'⁵⁰ The organisation also received a grant of £200 from the United Services Fund, partly to turn some space in the Ebury Street headquarters into a showroom. From the outset the intention of the organisation was to enable men to work at home as most who enlisted were either bedridden or housebound (**Fig. 3**). Men were taught by home visits or by postal instruction and if they encountered a particular issue or problem in their work and were able to reach Belgravia but unable to leave their bathchairs, and climb the steps and enter the Ebury Street building, they were taught in the street (**Fig. 4**).

Ernest Thesiger suggested that the reason his proposal of an embroidery workshop was unsuccessful was because Government officials thought it was too 'effeminate [an]

occupation for ex-soldiers.⁵¹ The fact that unemployed veterans had to resort to what was widely perceived as an exclusively feminized industry fed into increasing anxiety about the war's effect on masculinity. Sir Alfred Mond in his 1927 meditation on unemployment and the post-war economy, *Industry and Politics*, expressed his own concern that the labour market had been depleted of 'its most virile manhood' as a result of the war and further by employing, throughout the period, women in heavy industry and wounded soldiers in what amounted to home-craft schemes.⁵² It was a widely echoed concern. One medical expert remonstrated in *Reveille*, a journal devoted to the issues surrounding disabled ex-servicemen:

Take embroidery: It is not likely a man will do much with this, but in the early stages of his recovery the working out in "cross-stitch" of some pattern, such as the regimental insignia or a design depicting a military scene, for a sofa pillow or similar article, is intensely interesting to the man, and perhaps may provide an heirloom for his family. Naturally this kind of work will not be continued; probably by the time the article is finished the recovery will be far enough along to make some more natural form of work possible.⁵³

First World War historian Ana Carden-Coyne has suggested embroidery was momentarily acceptable for men as it was an activity 'regarded as psychologically healing, helping the weary and embattled to regain manhood through a transitional state of feminized becoming, beginning with gentle womanly arts.'⁵⁴ This partook of the 'pervasive [Victorian] fantasy of male development in which men became masculine only after an initial feminine stage'; ideas which would have a renewed currency within the culture of post-war sexology and Freudian psychoanalysis.⁵⁵ However, the 'sensory, affective and psychological' appeal of craft operated only at the level of rehabilitation that ultimately desired to remasculinise the veteran before returning him to civilian life reinforcing rather than contesting the 'traditional role of women as nurturing and self-abnegating.'⁵⁶ This takes into account little of the actual achievements of the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry, which although sharing much with the short-lived workshops established to teach crafts to soldiers throughout the country, it managed to cultivate and maintain a strong customer-base and grow exponentially as a business in the precarious interwar decades.

By 1927 the Friends of the Poor was operating with an estimated £60,000 in capital and had secured lucrative agreements for the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry with important companies, such as Pearsall's who supplied all their silk and wool threads and who often promoted the workshop in their advertisements and Weldon's the pattern-makers who supported the workshop through its magazines and mail-order service and occasionally commissioning the disabled ex-servicemen make up their patterns for publicity purposes. Schemes such as that by the Royal School of Needlework to teach embroidery to recovering soldiers at Netley Hospital, near Southampton, and numerous other regional Soldiers' Embroidery Guilds founded by various branches of provincial Arts and Crafts societies or Women's Institutes, faded and dissipated as the 1920s began. A Guild of Soldier and Sailor Broderers was opened on London's Oxford Street in 1918 by Lady Titchfield, through the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, under the auspices of the War Services Legion, which was initially the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry's obvious competitor but its work remained limited to an exclusive focus on military embroidery (**Fig. 5**).⁵⁷ If poverty had been the motivation behind the establishment of the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry, its success rested on its identification of English embroidery as a site of national patrimony.

Patrimony and embroidery

In the summer of 1919 the very first exhibition of work by the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry was held in London at 'Chelsea House' in Cadogan Place, the home of shipping magnate Sir Owen Philipps. The exhibition attracted modest attention in the press but Queen Mary had already been to Ebury Street to see the first samples of work produced by the men and was so impressed that she ordered an altar frontal for the private chapel at Buckingham Palace to commemorate the signing of the Treaty of Versailles.⁵⁸ Photography, press reports and displays in grand houses were to prove essential to the promotion of the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry throughout the 1920s. Attention was largely focused on venues in the metropolis. For instance, in 1920 Sir Owen and Lady Philipps hosted displays in March and May (**Fig. 6**), and in June a small exhibition of work was held at the Park Lane residence of the politician, aesthete and society host Sir Philip Sassoon. The previous November, the Marchioness of Zetland's large display of the organisation's work at her country house Aske Hall, in North Yorkshire, appears to be one of the few instances in which work was sent outside London.

Initially press reports did not take the idea of disabled ex-serviceman embroidering entirely seriously. One headline quipped 'Soldiers Sister Susie Sewed for Seek to Sew Themselves,' a pun on the popular wartime song 'Sister Susie's Sewing Shirts for Soldiers.'⁵⁹ But the impressive nature of their church embroideries, such as the altar frontal for St. David's Cathedral in Cardiff, completed in 1920, prompted one reporter to admit that the soldier embroiderers proved 'serious rivals' to any guild or workshop.⁶⁰ The style and techniques of the organisation's ecclesiastical embroideries owed much to late Victorian design. In 1922 Winifred Cardozo, a recent gold medallist at the Royal School of Needlework, was appointed chief designer. But for the first four years of operation 'Miss A.E. Shelford' worked as 'Hon. Sec. Church Embroidery.' She had previously been at the helm of St. Mary Abbots Guild of Church Embroidery in Kensington, a church closely associated with the Church Army and where Revd Wilson Carlile had been curate. The use of brightly coloured silk and satin as well as cotton and wool threads, in subtle natural as well as metallic colours, of detailed surface decoration in techniques such as brocade and appliqué, and historically researched floral and liturgical symbolism, show the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry worked to a very high standard. However, there was a range of skill levels amongst the men. Aside from these early highly sophisticated ecclesiastical embroideries 'garden aprons, weeding mats, etc.,' were 'made by the less skilful men' and sold at a stall at the Chelsea Flower show.⁶¹

Images of the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry, its embroiderers and its products, were widely circulated in the press and routinely appeared in women's magazines in the period. In May 1920, *The Ladies Field* (**Fig. 7**) ran an article covering of the organisation's current exhibition, describing the men as 'skilled copyists' and detailing their various achievements in petit point (small fine stitches on a fine mesh canvas), gros point (fine stitches on a larger mesh) as well as Gobelin stitch (free hand stitches that resembled the warp and weft of tapestry weave). The article quoted a letter from a soldier embroiderer in Glamorganshire who apologised for his lack of skill as he had formerly worked as the village blacksmith and had difficulty substituting his hammer for a needle. In December 1920 a longer, more detailed feature clearly designed to drum up business appeared in *House & Garden* (**Fig. 8**)

which remarked 'It is not necessary to dwell on the excellence of a scheme which provides a congenial and interesting occupation, as well as a means of supplementing a pension, to men on whom the compulsory idleness of disablement can only weigh heavily.' Such a presence in the popular press suggests although it is widely accepted that femininity was widely contested in the interwar popular culture this should not obviate a comparative interrogation of masculinity in the same arenas.⁶² The ways in which men were mediated in a female-oriented arena, such as women's magazines, perhaps has as much to say about the shaping of masculinity in the period as studies of exclusively homosocial contexts, such as boarding schools, prisons, professional and amateur sport, 'boy's own papers' and adventure fiction and even the military itself. Indeed, not only the presence but the success of the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry in the 'needlework mania' that followed the First World War and characterised much of the interwar years is hard to deny.⁶³

Much attention was paid in the press to the delicacy and intricacy of the men's work: 'it is difficult to realise that it is the work of masculine fingers unused, till a few years ago, to handle such a delicate instrument as a needle.'⁶⁴ The essentialised masculinity of the soldiers also seemed altered: 'During the war, when we used to see big guardsmen and stalwart gunners propped up in bed in hospital busily embroidering belts or working the badge of the regiment to be framed we little thought that in time to come many of the men would be doing this work for a living.'⁶⁵ The heteronormative identity of these men was fortified by reference to marital status, as 'husbands' with 'families,' as 'breadwinners,' and there was no suggestion that they were aided in their sewing by their wives or daughters who could have readily done so.⁶⁶ In the summer of 1924 a newspaper report posed the questions, 'Can Men Sew? Ought they to learn?' and suggested the fact that 'Disabled soldiers have taken up the needle and cotton in hundrds [sic]' as evidence 'that needlework is not a manly occupation is quite exploded.'⁶⁷ Earlier, that April, Lady Mary Morrison hosted a small show of embroideries made exclusively by men in her Belgravia home, 9 Halkin Street. Contributors included several peers, such as Viscount Ennismore, Lord Gainford and Lord Carmichael, as well as 'gentlemen' such as Edgar Lister, Henry Hoare, Hubert Astley and Ernest Thesiger: 'We need no proof that in some of what we incline to consider essentially feminine industries men can meet us and sometimes beat us.'⁶⁸ Following this the committee in charge of organising the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry's annual exhibition announced that the 1925 show would run in tandem with an amateur needlework competition, for a 'Golden Thimble' prize, with separate sections for women and men.⁶⁹

The exhibition was scheduled for May but already by a few weeks into the New Year the press began debating the reasons why 'men [were] entering into women's sphere.'⁷⁰ Did men now have delicate 'Hands Like Women,' one report asked shoring up a list of examples of male dressmakers, milliners and interior designers.⁷¹ Professional designers, such as 'M. Paul Poiret,' aside why were men turning to amateur feminine crafts? Was it perhaps because, 'in spite of the encroachment of the fair sex upon men's sphere, there is another side to the story. Man is showing laudable and astonishing adaptability to changing times.'⁷² The 1925 'Golden Thimble' competition, and exhibition, hosted by the Duchess of Norfolk at her St. James' Square mansion, was a highly glamorous affair, with a guest list drawn from Debrett's the press jokingly observed, and a judging panel comprising A.F. Kendrick, former Keeper of the Textile Department at the Victoria and Albert Museum, W.G. Paulson-Townsend, former Design Master at the Royal School of Needlework, and Louisa Pesel, a leading textile expert who had experience of teaching embroidery to shell-shocked men in a Yorkshire hospital.⁷³

Special sections for the women entrants included canvas work, samplers, church work, lace and linen work, and needlework pictures whereas the male competitors were judged under two categories: 'Section Ia. Canvas Work for Men (Gros point, petit point, etc.)' and 'Embroidery for Men (Of Any Kind Not Specified in Section Ia).' Entries in the men's section included embroidered chair seats, cushions and fire screens as well as a portrait of Edward VII and needlework pictures, including one of a 'Race Horse.'⁷⁴

Upon seeing the displays Queen Mary exclaimed, 'Why, the men are as good as the women!'⁷⁵ Much attention was given to entrants such as Lord Gainford. 'One of England's big game hunters, is an expert with his needle as with his gun,' ran a typical newspaper report.⁷⁶ The show also included work by military men, other titled nobility and society figures, as well as contributions from over seventy members of the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry.⁷⁷ Gainford, a former Liberal M.P., current Chairman of the B.B.C. and director of a coalmining empire, was awarded first prize for his embroidered chair cover copied after a Louis XIV design in Bowes Museum, near his family home in Co. Durham.⁷⁸ Lord Aberdare, a Welsh peer who had served in the First World War and who was father of Clarence Bruce, the celebrated sportsman, made the official speech at the opening of the exhibition, in which he commended the Friends of the Poor on their laudable enterprise, acknowledging that not only had the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry made £2,740 in the past three years but the men 'were very proud of their embroideries, and also appreciated being able to add in some degree to the family income.'⁷⁹

Throughout the interwar years the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry became increasingly associated with the promotion of the quintessentially aristocratic and English identity of embroidery. Needlework became synonymous with both patrimony and patriotism. In 1922, Lady Bathurst wrote to the press, commenting that 'the perfection of colour, stitchery, and good taste which the work of these men shows so markedly is largely due to the teaching of Mr. Ernest Thesiger,' grandson of Lord Chelmsford she noted, but further 'these disabled soldiers' have revitalised the heritage of English embroidery in their return to 'Old English tapestry' as their principal source, just as 'William Morris' had done in the nineteenth century.'⁸⁰ Reviewers generally concurred that it was the 'disabled ex-service men who are carrying on the finest traditions of British needlework.'⁸¹ Thesiger's original idea of men copying and mending old needlework proved decisive for the organisation. Early designs were 'traced' from seventeenth and eighteenth century sources but as the men quickly became more skilled and ambitious there was greater margin for freedom and expression.⁸² Thesiger argued; 'Needlework is one of the most persistent forms of self-expression, an outlet for the creative instinct that is so strong in everyone, and for it to fulfil this purpose designer and worker should if possible be one and the same person; at any rate they should be strongly in sympathy.'⁸³ He urged embroiderers to look forward as well as backward, suggesting they also consider the design qualities inherent in diverse sources from contemporary photography and advertising to the Ballets Russes and abstract painting.

At the exhibition of 'Old English Needlework' held at Lady Bathurst's home, in Belgrave Square, during March 1926, three soldiers, 'one of whom ha[d] only one arm,' made a copy of a Queen Anne quilt owned by Princess Marie Louise; 'reproducing most faithfully, not merely the design and stitchery, but even the quaint old tones of pinks and blues.'⁸⁴ The two quilts were hung side-by-side in the exhibition to emphasise the past-present correspondence. The press noted that the exhibition 'showed not only how much the disabled have advanced

in the craft of needlework' but 'their ability in copying or repairing antique work.'⁸⁵ By the 'English Needlework (Past & Present)' exhibition, held at Lady Maud Carnegie's Portman Square home, in February-March 1934, the cushion cover copied after one of the so-called late sixteenth century Sheldon tapestries (thought to be the pinnacle of English textile design) was the only historic 'copy' by the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry in the exhibition.⁸⁶ Their several other exhibits were either adaptations or original designs. The looser, often slightly abstracted, stylised, flattened and patterned designs, in petit point, split stitch, tent stitch and cross-stitch, were nearly always designed for furniture or the interior. Surviving examples show simple designs of flora and fauna in a contemporary style characterised by one critic as 'needleworky' in its approximation of the primitivism of seventeenth century English stumpwork or Jacobean crewelwork (**Fig. 9**).⁸⁷ Such work using wool, often on unbleached linen, was suited to beginners or those just learning specific techniques but more complex, densely patterned, deeply coloured floral sprays for large quilts and bedspreads were worked in more delicate silk and satin threads (**Fig. 10**).

The subtle sense of 'spontaneity and vitality' found in the design of such embroideries further reflected something of the stylistic and technical preoccupations in contemporary British needlework.⁸⁸ Ideas, both technical and aesthetic, that drew on historic embroidery were very much evident in the work of professional embroiderers such as Mary Hogarth, Rosamund Willis and Mary Symonds, Bloomsbury artists such as Roger Fry, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, and modern artists and designers such as Edward Wadsworth and E. McKnight Kauffer. Examples of embroidered work by all these artists and designers was also on display in the 'English Needlework (Past & Present)' exhibition. Indeed, in the new wave of writing about needlework in the interwar years, largely by artists and designers from Roger Fry to Grace Christie and Mary Hogarth, the importance of historic examples, such as Jacobean crewelwork or Elizabethan domestic embroidery for the modern artist, was often extolled.⁸⁹ Indeed, the folksy figurative design in Mary Hogarth's embroideries, in particular, rather than reflecting an interest in modernity betray her debt to the Sheldon tapestries, so widely displayed and talked about in the 1920s. It was also generally agreed by Hogarth and her contemporaries that 'copying' old work was crucial for learning techniques and developing skill.

Throughout the interwar years the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry also worked to commission. The late 1920s and early 1930s saw the completion of copies after historic maps for private collectors, such as the Prince of Wales for his home Fort Belvedere, as well as ecclesiastical embroideries, such as those for St. George's Memorial Chapel at Ypres, and a chapel on-board Cunard's much-fêted RMS *Queen Mary*.⁹⁰ They also continued to court Royal patronage. At the 1929 exhibition Queen Mary's granddaughter, Princess Elizabeth, was not present at the exhibition's opening but after the men presented the Queen with an 'exquisite little chair worked by a man in Cameron Highlanders wounded in throat and chest,' the Princess was sent for so she could thank the man personally. The image of her shaking hands with him was widely distributed in the press.⁹¹ At the 1933 exhibition Princess Elizabeth received 'a small blue bag embroidered in petit point, with her initial "E" and a crown on the front of it' from the men and her sister, Princess Margaret Rose, was given 'a small chair of walnut, made on the Chippendale lines, with the seat embroidered in petit point showing, a funny little man going shooting with his two dogs.'⁹² Press photographs of these events were made into postcards as souvenirs highlighting the significant role played by the image of sovereign compassion in the public perception of the workshop. By the beginning

of the Second World War Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry's annual exhibitions were suspended. Although they continued to show at the annual Disabled Men's Handicrafts Exhibitions held at the Imperial Institute in South Kensington, which had been inaugurated in 1927 following Sir William Furse's appointment as Director and his desire to reinvigorate the displays and widen the Institute's audience.⁹³ They also showed in the 1940s and 1950s at the occasional sales at the Lord Roberts Memorial Workshops on Brompton Road in Knightsbridge.

By 1955, the annual report records that the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry was to close.⁹⁴ Its founder, Annie Collin died in 1957.⁹⁵ Princess Marie Louise and the Marchioness of Carisbrooke both died in 1956. However, in April 1960 Dorothy Vaisey, the successor of Collin at the helm of the Friends of the Poor, wrote a short note to King George V and Queen Mary's granddaughter, Princess Margaret, accompanying a wedding gift from the organisation of a chair with an embroidered seat made by 'one of our disabled men.'⁹⁶ In her reply Princess Margaret conveyed her sincere appreciation, remarking on the fineness of the 'beautiful needlework.'⁹⁷ Some of the men had, clearly, continued to work beyond the official closure of the business. The last reference of the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry is found in the mention of 'Miss M.E. Stuart' representing the organisation at Ernest Thesiger's memorial service at Holy Trinity Church in South Kensington, following his death in January 1961.⁹⁸

Conclusion

In accounts of the history of modern needlecrafts the story of the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry may be overlooked but that should not render it insignificant. As a much neglected episode in the history of design it does much more than simply highlight the transformation of the so-called masculine 'flight from domesticity' in the late nineteenth century to a 'redomestication' in the years immediately after the First World War.⁹⁹ Even if we read it in terms of how it has been critically ignored it reveals just how embroidery did play a role in the social construction of the masculine subject – if largely by exclusion and erasure.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, aside from the fact that a study of this organisation helps to illuminate masculine subject positions it also reveals much of the complex ways in which disability has been feminized, fetishized and denied.¹⁰¹ As we approach the centenary of founding of the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry, it surely deserves to be better documented and better known particularly in terms of the unique insight it offers into how masculinity and disability have been mediated and contested – narratives that are very much absent in the study of design history.

In her survey of modern embroidery, written in the early 1930s, Mary Hogarth argued that 'Since the Great War a new school of design has been growing up.'¹⁰² Although now rarely studied in any real depth embroidery, of the interwar decades, was recognised as part of this wider cultural regeneration. Yet, even though the significance of Hogarth's work as a designer, and as an out-worker for others, is widely acknowledged the work of the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry seems, at first glance, not so much on the margins as beyond them. There is, however, much common ground between the work of Hogarth and her contemporaries and that of the disabled soldiers (not least in their use of the exact same

materials – Pearsall's threads, for instance). Unlike standard studies of early twentieth century design even a cursory analysis of the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry, with its origins in the networks of Victorian cultural philanthropy, allows us, furthermore, to see design culture in this period in terms of continuity rather than disruption with the past. The Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry must also be seen, in part, as having a legacy not just in the Government's *Needlecraft for H.M. Forces by Penelope* kits of the Second World War, but also in the continued popularity of needlework as a form of occupational therapy.¹⁰³

But what of the men who made up band of 'medieval châtelaines,' who wheeled themselves through London to exhibitions; who formed guards of honour with their crutches outside palatial Belgravia houses as a Royal dignitaries arrived at an opening; who stitched large and complex embroideries while laying flat on their backs, or with one hand, sometimes in discomfort, sometimes in pain; who told newspaper reporters cheerful stories of how sewing was 'good for the nerves' and how it thwarted 'melancholy.'¹⁰⁴ Although much forgotten the labours of such men were unique in providing the war disabled with a means to alleviate poverty, if only temporarily, and participate in the shaping of national patrimony, in the elite and glamorous spaces of the metropolis to which they would otherwise never have had access. Beyond the novelty and incongruity of embroidery 'worked by masculine fingers' we need to see that the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry exposes the often imperceptible fault-lines that exist between design and disability, between charity and commerce, and between masculinity and femininity.¹⁰⁵ During the first few decades of the twentieth century the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry seemed to be in the ferment of British design and surely '[i]t is this interconnectedness which places a responsibility on us to construct historical accounts which address the gaps, the silences and the margins of our disciplines.'¹⁰⁶

NOTES

¹ Diary of King George V, 9 May 1927, p. 20, RA GV/PRIV/GVD/1927; and, Diary of Queen Mary, 9 May 1927, p. 129, RA QM/PRIV/QMD/1927; The Royal Archives, Windsor. Reproduced by Kind Permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

² 'Disabled Men's Work,' *Daily Mail*, 10 May 1927, Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry Archive, Courtesy of Friends of the Elderly [hereafter DSEI Archive].

³ 'Needlework Display: Royal Visitors,' *The Scotsman*, 10 May 1927, DSEI Archive.

⁴ 'Beautiful Needlework: The Queen Purchases Disabled Men's Stitcheries,' *Daily Mail*, 11 May 1927, DSEI Archive.

⁵ 'Needlework Display: Royal Visitors,' *The Scotsman*, 10 May 1927, DSEI Archive.

⁶ There was widespread coverage of this event in the press, 'Clever Needlemen: Their Work Astonishes The Queen,' *Star*, 9 May 1927, 'Disabled Men's Work: The Queen's Purchase of Embroidery,' *Daily Mail*, 10 May 1927, 'King Examines Needlework: Surprised by Skill of Ex-Soldiers,' *Nottingham Guardian*, 10 May 1927, 'A Kindly Interest: King and Queen see Disabled ex-Soldiers' Needlework,' *The Bulletin & Scots Pictorial*, 10 May 1927, 'The Royal Exemplar of Democracy,' *Sphere*, 14 May 1927, 'The Excellence of Needlemen,' *Lady*, 19 May 1927, and 'She Does Not Forget,' *Daily Mirror*, 29 May 1927. Illustrated articles appeared on the 9 and 10 May, including 'King and Queen Visit Totally Disabled Soldiers,' *Nottingham Journal & Express*, 'King and Queen's Visit to Disabled Soldiers,' *Cambria Daily Leader*, 'Surprise for Disabled Soldiers,' *Westminster Gazette*, 'King and Queen with Ex-Soldiers,' *Evening Standard*, and also in the *Daily Sketch*, *Morning Post*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Glasgow Herald*, *Evening Telegraph & Post*, *Eastern Daily Press*, and *Bystander*, with shorter notices in the *Morning Post*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily News*, *Northern*

Echo, *Western Morning News*, *Newcastle Daily Journal*, *Bristol Times & Mirror*, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, *Surrey Daily News*, *Yorkshire Herald*, and *Northern Whig*, DSEI Archive.

⁷ 'Soldier Broderers: The King and Queen Inspect Disabled Men's Work,' *Morning Post*, 10 May 1927, 'Their Majesties' Visit,' *Belfast News-Letter*, 10 May 1927, and 'Beautiful Needlework,' *Daily Mail*, 11 May 1927, DSEI Archive.

⁸ 'Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery: The King and Queen at Exhibition,' *The Times*, 10 May 1927, p. 13, and 'Embroideries by Disabled Ex-Soldiers: An Interesting Exhibition,' *The Queen*, 18 May 1927, DSEI Archive. In 1946, Queen Mary gave the casket to the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ C. Edwards, 'Home is Where the Art Is': Women, Handicrafts and Home Improvement, 1750-1900,' *Journal of Design History*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2006, p. 12.

¹¹ The material on femininity and needlework is vast – key sources include, A. Callen, *Angel in the Studio: Women in the Arts and Crafts Movement, 1870-1914*, Astragal, London, 1979; T.J. Edelstein, 'They Sang the "Song of the Shirt": Visual Iconology of the Seamstress,' *Victorian Studies*, vol. 23, no. 2, winter 1980, pp. 183-210; C. Walkley, *The Ghost in the Looking Glass: The Victorian Seamstress*, Peter Owen, London, 1981; D. Cherry, 'Surveying Seamstresses,' *Feminist Art News*, 9, 1983, pp. 27-29; R. Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, The Women's Press, London, 1984; H. Rodgers, 'The Good Are Not Always Powerful, Not The Powerful Always Good': The Politics of Women's Needlework in Mid-Victorian London,' *Victorian Studies*, vol. 40, no. 4, summer 1997, pp. 589-623; L.M. Alexander, *Women, Work, and Representation: Needlewomen in Victorian Art and Literature*, Ohio University Press, Athens, 2003; B. Harris (ed.), *Famine and Fashion: Needlewomen in the Nineteenth Century*, Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT, 2005; P. Zakreski, *Representing Female Artistic Labour, 1848-1900*, Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT, 2006; J. Helland, *British and Irish Home Arts and Industries: Marketing Craft, Making Fashion*, Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 2007; M.D. Groggin and B.F. Tobin (eds), *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework & Textiles, 1750-1950*, Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT, 2009; and K. Hadjiafxendi and P. Zakreski (eds), *Crafting the Woman Professional in the Long Nineteenth Century: Artistry and Industry in Britain*, Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT, 2013. This is far from a definitive list and by no stretch of the imagination do such studies exclude men as producers of needlework but analysis is often reductive or limited. For example, Talia Schaffer in her impressive re-reading of Victorian amateur handicrafts does acknowledge the presence of the male craftmaker but places her discussion in an endnote, see *Novel Craft: Victorian Domestic Handicraft & Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2011, p. 196, n. 68.

¹² For important, if brief, exceptions see C. Breward, 'Sewing Soldiers,' in S. Prichard (ed.), *Quilts, 1700-2010: Hidden Histories, Untold Stories*, V&A Publishing, London, 2010, pp. 84-87; K. Galster and M.-L. Nosch (eds), 'Textile History and the Military,' Supplement, *Textile History*, vol. 41, no. 1, May 2010; R. Holmes, *Soldiers*, HarperPress, London, 2011, pp. 352, 445, 528 and 547; and H. Furneaux, *Military Men of Feeling: Emotion, Touch, and Masculinity in the Crimean War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016, pp. 147-186. **Men's needlework skills persisted through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in London's ancient livery companies such as The Worshipful Company of Broderers, and in its historic systems of tailoring and military embroidery but historiographical studies of these have tended to focus on men exclusively as consumers, see for example C. Breward, *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, fashion and city life, 1860-1914*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 1999; and A. Miller, *Dressed to Kill: British Navel Uniform, Masculinity and Contemporary Fashion 1748-1857*, National Maritime Museum Greenwich, London, 2007.**

¹³ For example see the ideas offered in terms of reading needlework as an act of both agency and subversion for women and for disabled women, in R. Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 1984; L. Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery and the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-1914*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1987; P. Kirkham, 'Women and the Inter-war Handicrafts Revival,' in J. Attfield and P. Kirkham (eds), *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design*, The Women's Press, London, 1989, pp. 174-183; F. Hackney, 'Use Your Hands for Happiness': Home Craft and Make-do-and-Mend in British Women's Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s,' *Journal of Design History*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2006, pp. 23-38; and V. Richmond, 'Crafting Inclusion for 'Invalid' Women: The Girls' Friendly Society Central Needlework Depôt, 1899-1947,' in J. Helland, B. Lemire and A. Buis (eds), *Craft, Community and the*

Material Culture of Place and Politics, 19th-20th Century, Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT, 2014, pp. 161-176.

¹⁴ At this time charity and philanthropy were widely characterised as 'womanized,' see F. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980, p. 223. For reflections on the construction of masculinity in the period, see G. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994; J. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, Reaktion, London, 1996; G. Koureas, *Memory, Masculinity and National Identity in British Visual Culture, 1914-1930: A Study in 'Unconquerable Manhood'*, Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT, 2007; and J. Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2009.

¹⁵ For the shifting notions of Victorian 'manliness' and 'masculinity' see J.A. Mangan and J. Walvin (eds), *Manliness and Morality: Middle-class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1987; L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, Hutchinson, London, 1987; R. Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1990; H. Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995; M. Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' in the late nineteenth century*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995; J. Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1999; and J.A. Mangan, 'Manufactured' Masculinity: Making Imperial Manliness, Morality and Militarism, Routledge, London and New York, 2012.

¹⁶ S.M. Gilbert, 'Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War,' *Signs*, 3, vol. 8, no. 3, Spring 1983, p. 423.

¹⁷ R. Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 1984, p. 6.

¹⁸ For the development of sexology and its impact on the conceptualization of masculinity and of deviance see E. Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin-de-siècle*, Virago, London, 1990; J.K. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London*, Virago, London, 1992; A. McLaren, *The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries, 1870-1930*, Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1997; and S. Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2005.

¹⁹ R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Polity, Cambridge, 1995, p. 35.

²⁰ M. Roper and J. Tosh, 'Introduction: Historians and the politics of masculinity,' in *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1991, p. 9.

²¹ R. Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1997, p. 6.

²² R. Shuttleworth, N. Wedgwood, and N.J. Wilson, 'The Dilemma of Disabled Masculinity,' *Men and Masculinities*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2012, p. 174; and D.A. Gerber, 'Introduction: Finding Disabled Veterans in History,' in idem (ed.), *Disabled Veterans in History*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2000, p. 8.

²³ 'Soldier Embroiderers,' *The Scotsman*, 16 May 1927, DSEI Archive.

²⁴ Such as the embroideries made for a church in Accra in the former British colony of the Gold Coast in west Africa, which became Ghana in 1957. See H.H. Princess Marie Louise, *Letters from the Gold Coast*, London, Methuen & Co., 1926, p. 22.

²⁵ See C. Howard, *Twentieth-Century Embroidery in Great Britain to 1939*, B.T. Batsford, London, 1981, p. 71; T. Beck, *The Embroiderers' Story: Needlework from the Renaissance to the Present Day*, David & Charles, Newton Abbott, Devon, 1995, pp. 138, 140; D. Cohen *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2001, p. 234, n. 44; L. Szygenda, 'Peace of Embroidery,' *Embroidery*, vol. 54, November 2003, p. 20; and L. Gosling, *Great War Britain: The First World War at Home*, The History Press, Stroud, Gloucestershire, 2014, pp. 229-230.

²⁶ Official statistics suggest that by the end of the war there were approximately 320,000 disabled men eligible for state pensions – totaling over a third of the estimated 900,000 ex-servicemen recorded at the Ministry of Pensions. By 1922 official figures show 356,978 men were registered for veteran training schemes and/or pensions. See *Report of the Departmental Committee on Compensation for Disabled Sailors and Soldiers under the Workman's Compensation Act, 1906*, HM Stationery Office, London, 1919; and *Report from the Select Committee on Training and Employment of Disabled Ex-Service Men*, HMSO, London, 1922, pp. 411-14.

²⁷ D.C. McMurtrie, *Experience in the Re-education of the Disabled Soldier in Great Britain*, no publisher, n.d. [c.1919], p. 26; and E. Thesiger, 'Work for Totally-Disabled,' *The War Pensions Gazette*, no. 37, May 1920, pp. 497-498.

²⁸ For this context see T. Harrod, 'Handicrafts and Reconstruction,' in *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1999, pp. 27-28.

²⁹ A. Borsay, *Disability and Social Policy in Britain since 1750: A History of Exclusion*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2005, p. 133.

³⁰ C.W. Hutt, *The Future of the Disabled Soldier*, Bale & Co., T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1917, p. 138.

³¹ 'The Problem of the Disabled Soldier,' *The Lancet*, vol. 188, issue 4864, 18 November 1916, pp. 867-868.

³² For the development of occupational therapy in Britain see C. Hocking, 'The Way We Were: Romantic Assumptions of Pioneering Occupational Therapists in the United Kingdom,' *The British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, vol. 71, no. 4, April 2008, pp. 146-154, 'The Way We Were: Thinking Rationally,' *The British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, vol. 71, no. 5, May 2008, pp. 185-195, and 'The Way We Were: The Ascendancy of Rationalism,' *The British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, vol. 71, no. 6, June 2008, pp. 226-233.

³³ For this see J. Laws, 'Crackpots and basket-cases: a history of therapeutic work and occupation,' *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 24, no. 2, July 2011, pp. 65-81.

³⁴ F. Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1995, pp. 169-212.

³⁵ See A. Anderson, 'Queen Victoria's Daughters and 'the tide of fashionable philanthropy,' *Women's History Magazine*, issue 41, June 2002, pp. 11-15, and idem, 'Victorian high society and social duty: the promotion of 'recreative learning and voluntary teaching,' *History of Education*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2002, pp. 311-334.

³⁶ 'Prospectus of Royal School of Art Needlework' quoted in B. Morris, *Victorian Embroidery*, Herbert Jenkins, London, 1962, p. 113.

³⁷ R.T. Williamson, 'Remarks on the Treatment of Neurasthenia and Psychasthenia Following Shell Shock,' *British Medical Journal*, vol. 2, no. 2970, 1 December 1917, pp. 713-715.

³⁸ See H. Verschoyle, *Seventy-five Years in Ebury Street (A History in Six-Parts)*, The Invicta Press, Ashford, Kent & London, n.d. [c.1980], p. 3; and B. Dawkins, 'The Friends of the Poor,' *The Queen*, 18 November 1911, p. 869, DSEI Archive.

³⁹ C.W. Hutt, *The Future of the Disabled Soldier*, 1917, p. 109.

⁴⁰ S. Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2004, p. 14.

⁴¹ Princess Mary Louise, *My Memories of Six Reigns*, Evans Brothers, London, 1956, p. 138.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ E. Thesiger, *Practically True*, William Heinemann, London, 1927, p. 121.

⁴⁴ See letter dated 15 November 1917 from Ernest Thesiger Major R.M. Mitchell, and the reply date 17 November 1917 from Major R.M. Mitchell to Thesiger, Ministry of Labour Papers, LAB 2/626/TDS6705/1919/PartsI&II, The National Archives, Kew [hereafter NA].

⁴⁵ W. Taylor, 'Memorandum on the possible utilisation of wounded soldiers in sedentary occupations,' submitted in January 1917, Ministry of Labour Papers, LAB 2/626/TDS6705/1919/PartsI&II, NA.

⁴⁶ See Design and Industries Association, 'On the Encouragement of Small Industrial Centres to Assist in the Reconstruction of Rural Life and the Employment of Discharged Soldiers with 'Preliminary Note upon the Relation of Handwork to Such Reconstruction,' Ministry of Labour Papers, LAB 2/626/TDS6705/1919/PartsI&II, NA.

⁴⁷ For the 'National Advisory Committee for Craft Training for Disabled Soldiers' see C. Malone, 'A job fit for heroes? Disabled veterans, the Arts and Crafts Movement and social reconstruction in post-World War I Britain', *First World War Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2013, pp. 201-217. The King's National Roll was a Government initiated scheme that inscribed onto a 'special' list the names of businesses in which 5% or more of their workforce was made up of men in receipt of disability pension, see M.Kowalsky, 'This Honourable Obligation': The King's National Roll Scheme for Disabled Ex-Servicemen 1915-1944', *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'Histoire*, vol. 14, no. 4, December 2007, pp. 567-584.

⁴⁸ See letter dated 13 January 1918, from Sir Charles Nicholson to London War Pensions Committee, including the three testimonials from commercial embroidery restorers and dealers provided by Ernest Thesiger, Ministry of Labour Papers, LAB 2/626/TDS6705/1919/PartsI&II, NA. And see H.D. Roberts, *The Inter-Allied Exhibition on the After-Care of Disabled Men, Central Hall, Westminster, 20 to 25 May 1918, Catalogue*, The Avenue Press, London, 1918. The success and suitability of needlework as a form of occupational therapy was already apparent on the Continent from the exhibition held at the Musée Galliéra in Paris in September 1916 and from the state-sponsored display of craftwork organised a year later in London. This included work from Allied countries, such as France and Belgium, but also from colonial contributions from South Africa, Australia and Canada. See *Exhibition for Encouraging Work Done by Wounded and Discharged Soldiers and Sailors, Galleries of Messrs. Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge, 34 & 35 Bond Street, London, W.1, 20-27 June 1917*, Dryden Press, London, 1917.

⁴⁹ See letter dated 24 January 1918, from R.M., Minister of Pensions to Sir Charles Nicholson of the Board of Education, Victoria and Albert Museum, Ministry of Labour Papers, LAB 2/626/TDS6705/1919/PartsI&II, NA.

⁵⁰ E. Thesiger, *Unpublished Notes for Autobiography*, 1955, p. 3, EFT000065, Ernest Thesiger Archive, Theatre Collection, University of Bristol.

⁵¹ E. Thesiger, *Practically True*, 1927, p. 122. Ernest Thesiger was particularly interested in the associations between effeminacy and embroidery. For a discussion of the context of Thesiger's embroidery in London's interwar queer subculture see my, 'Nothing is more terrifying to me than to see Ernest Thesiger sitting under the lamplight doing this embroidery': Ernest Thesiger (1879-1961), 'Expert Embroiderer', *TEXT: Journal for the Study of Textile Art, Design and History*, vol. 43, 2015/16, pp. 20-26, and 'Queer hobbies: Ernest Thesiger and interwar embroidery,' *Textile: Journal of Cloth and Culture*, forthcoming.

⁵² A. Mond, *Industry and Politics*, Macmillan, London, 1927, p. 6.

⁵³ J.E. Goldthwait, 'Bedside Occupations for Wounded Soldiers,' in J. Galsworthy (ed.), *Reveille: Devoted to the Disabled Sailor and Soldier*, no. 1, August 1918, p. 77.

⁵⁴ A. Carden-Coyne, 'Sensory Trauma and Feminized Therapies: Gendering Rehabilitation,' in *The Politics of Wounds: Military Patients and Medical Power in the First World War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014, pp. 265-266.

⁵⁵ C. Robson, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2001, p. 3; and see C. Nelson, *Boys Will Be Girls: The Feminine Ethic and British Children's Fiction, 1857-1917*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ, and London, 1991. For the development of sexology and psychoanalysis in relation to masculinity and homosexuality in this period see C. Waters, 'Havelock Ellis, Sigmund Freud and the State: Discourses of Homosexuality in Interwar Britain,' in L. Bland and L. Doan (eds), *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Diseases*, Polity Press, 1998, pp. 165-179.

⁵⁶ K. Macdonald, 'The Women's Body as Compensation for the Disabled First World War Soldier,' *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 10, issue 1, 2016, p. 68.

⁵⁷ See C. Cleve, 'Women and the War,' *Illustrated War News*, published by *The Illustrated London News and The Sketch*, vol. 8 [New Series], 27 March 1918, pp. 398-400. Information regarding this short-lived workshop can be found in NA T161/797/10 and V&A E.1178.1921.

⁵⁸ 'Court Circular,' *The Times*, 1 July 1919, p. 15. The altar frontal is believed to have been lost when the chapel at Buckingham Palace was destroyed during the Blitz in September 1940.

⁵⁹ 'Needlework for Men: Sister Susie Sewing Shirts for Soldiers,' *Evening Standard*, 12 October 1920, DSEI Archive.

⁶⁰ 'Soldiers' Embroidery,' *Evening Standard*, 22 June 1920, DSEI Archive.

⁶¹ 'Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry,' *The Friends of the Poor (Incorporated). The Twenty-Second Report (For the Nine Months Ended December 31st, 1926.)*, p. 11.

⁶² See F. Hackney, "'Women Are News': British Women's Magazines 1919-1939," in A. L. Ardis and P. Collier (eds), *Transatlantic Print Culture, 1880-1940: Emerging Media, Emerging Modernisms*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 114-133; and for masculinity in the interwar popular press see A. Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2004, pp. 216-243. Adverts for the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry appeared in women's magazines throughout the 1920s and into the late 1930s – see for example the advert in *The Embroideress*, vol. 8, April 1937, p. x.

⁶³ *The Times*, 28 August 1914, quoted in G.J. DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War*, Longman, London, 1996, p. 68.

⁶⁴ 'Beautiful Embroideries by Disabled Soldiers,' *The Queen*, 29 April 1925, DSEI Archive.

⁶⁵ 'Ex-Service Needlemen,' *Sunday Times*, 12 February 1922, DSEI Archive.

⁶⁶ For this context see J. Meyer, "'Not Septimus Now': wives of disabled veterans and cultural memory of the First World War in Britain," *Women's History Review*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2004, pp. 117-138.

⁶⁷ 'Good Needle Men,' *Evening Standard*, 14 August 1924, DSEI Archive.

⁶⁸ A.E.L., 'The World of Women,' *The Illustrated London News*, 19 April 1924, issue 4435, p. 710.

⁶⁹ 'The Golden Thimble,' *Daily Chronicle*, 15 August 1924, DSEI Archive.

⁷⁰ G. Barbour, 'Men Who Are Doing Women's Work,' *Birmingham Evening Dispatch*, 16 February 1925, DSEI Archive.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ In 1917 Pesel help found the Bradford Khaki Handicrafts Club for veterans at the Abram Peel Hospital, a military centre specialising in neurological disorders. For Pesel's recollection of the inspiration and founding of the workshop see L. Pesel, 'Handicrafts that Heal', unpublished manuscript, p. 5, Louisa Pesel Collection, ULITA, University of Leeds.

⁷⁴ See entries no.'s 203-220 in *Catalogue of the Needlework Competition Exhibits at Norfolk House, St. James's Square (by kind permission of Her Grace the Duchess of Norfolk) on May 6th, 7th and 8th, 1925 Organised by The Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry of The Friends of the Poor, 42, Ebury Street, S.W.1*, Dryden Press, London, 1925, pp. 10-11.

⁷⁵ 'Queen Praises Men's Needlework,' *Evening News*, 6 May 1925, DSEI Archive.

⁷⁶ 'Peers as Needlework Experts,' *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 20 January 1925, DSEI Archive.

⁷⁷ 'Lord Gainford and His Thimble,' *Evening Standard*, 6 May 1925, DSEI Archive.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ 'Disabled Men's Embroidery,' *The Times*, 7 May 1925, p. 11.

⁸⁰ 'Letters to the Editor: Disabled Soldiers' Needlework: Power of Taking Pains Not Dead,' *Morning Post*, 14 April 1922, DSEI Archive.

⁸¹ 'Needlework – Old and New,' *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 31 May 1926, DSEI Archive.

⁸² 'Soldiers' Needlework,' *House & Garden*, December 1920, vol. 1, no. Two, pp. 50 and 70.

⁸³ E. Thesiger, *Adventures in Embroidery*, The Studio, London and New York, 1941, p. 9.

⁸⁴ See *Catalogue of Antique English Needlework shewn at Bathurst House, Belgrave Square (by kind permission of Lord & Lady Bathurst) on 17th, 18th and 19th March 1926, in connection with The Annual Exhibition & Sale of work done by The Disabled Soldiers Embroidery Industry, 42 Ebury Street, S.W.1*,

London, 1926. Also see 'Men 'Broiderers,' *The Gentlewoman*, 27 March 1926, and 'Heirlooms on Show: Disabled Soldiers Imitate a Queen Anne Bedspread,' *Daily Graphic*, 18 March 1926, DSEI Archive.

⁸⁵ 'Old English Needlework at Bathurst House,' *The Connoisseur*, vol. LXXV, no. 297, May 1926, p. 60.

⁸⁶ The copy was after the Shelton *Flight into Egypt*, dated c.1600-1615, in the Victoria and Albert Museum (T.191-1926). It was commissioned by Lady Mond, by then Lady Melchett after her husband was created 1st Baron Melchett. See no. 197 in *Catalogue of the Exhibition of English Needlework (Past and Present) in Aid of the Artists' General Benevolent Institution, February 19th – March 12th, 1934, 15 Portman Square, W.1. By kind permission of The Lord & Lady Maud Carnegie*, London, 1934. The Sheldon tapestry maps were believed to have been made in 1580s by the first major English weaving workshop, founded by the Sheldon family. Their provenance is now thought to be attributable to other, possibly even Continental, workshops as well as the Sheldon family's own workshop, see A.F. Kendrick, *Catalogue of Tapestries*, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1924; H.L. Turner, 'Pride and Patriotism Mapped in Wool,' in P. Barber (ed.), *The Map Book*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 2005, pp. 128-129; H.L. Turner, 'Tapestries once at Chastleton House and their influence on the image of the tapestries called Sheldon: a re-assessment,' *Antiquaries Journal*, vol. 88, 2008, pp. 313-343; and H.L. Turner, *No Mean Prospect: Ralph Sheldon's Tapestry Maps*, Plotwood Press, Derby, 2010.

⁸⁷ E. Ruth Rayner, 'The Embroiderers' Guild Exhibition,' *The Studio*, vol. LXXXVII, 1924, p. 18.

⁸⁸ For the characterisation of interwar embroidery in terms of 'spontaneity and vitality,' see T. Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*, 1999, p. 148.

⁸⁹ Roger Fry wittily reflected that even the Victorian take on 'crewelwork' was due a revival, see his 'The Ottoman and the Whatnot,' *Athenaeum*, no. 4652, 27 June 1919, pp. 529-530, reprinted in *Vision and Design*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1920, pp. 26-30. Both Grace Christie and Mary Hogarth stressed the importance of 'tradition' and the 'past' for the contemporary artist, see G. Christie, *Samplers and Stitches: A Handbook of the Embroiderers' Art*, B.T. Batsford, London, 1920, pp. 1-6, and M. Hogarth, *Modern Embroidery*, The Studio, London and New York, 1933, pp. 9-12.

⁹⁰ See D. Alston, 'England in Embroidered Maps,' *Vogue*, vol. 71, no. 12, 1928, pp. 104, 112 and 118. Details of the Ypres and RMS *Queen Mary* commissions are recorded in 'Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry,' *The Friends of the Poor (Incorporated). The Thirty-First Report (For the Year Ending September 30th, 1935)*, p. 9.

⁹¹ 'The Camera As Recorder: News by Photography,' *The Illustrated London News*, 22 June 1929, p. 1093. And see 'Disabled Soldiers as Master Embroiderers,' *The Queen*, 5 June 1929, p. 5, and 'Princess and the Pekingese: Duchess of York at Embroidery Sale,' *Western Morning News & Mercury*, 12 June 1929, DSEI Archive.

⁹² 'Gifts for Little Princesses at Bazaar,' *Daily Mirror*, 17 May 1933, DSEI Archive.

⁹³ *Imperial Institute: Annual Report, 1926. By the Director, Lt-Gen Sir William Furse, K.C.B., D.S.O., To the Board of Governors (Meeting, 9th February 1927)*, London, 1927, p. 25.

⁹⁴ 'Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry,' *The Friends of the Poor (Incorporated). The Fifty-Ninth Report (For the Year Ending September 30th, 1955)*, p. 4

⁹⁵ Annie Collin had retired from the Friends of the Poor in 1945 aged ninety-three, see 'A Friend of the Poor: Miss Annie Collin's 100th Birthday,' *The Times*, 5 February 1952, p. 6; and 'Miss Annie Collin: Friend of the Poor,' *The Times*, 16 July 1957, p. 14.

⁹⁶ Copy of letter from Dorothy Vaisey to Princess Margaret, undated, DSEI Archive.

⁹⁷ Copy of letter from Princess Margaret to Dorothy Vaisey, 30 April 1960, DSEI Archive.

⁹⁸ 'Miss Stuart' has been on the committee of the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry since 1922. 'Memorial Service: Ernest Thesiger,' *The Times*, 31 January 1961, p. 12.

⁹⁹ J. Tosh, 'Home and Away: The Flight from Domesticity in Late Nineteenth Century England Re-Visited,' *Gender & History*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2015, pp. 561-575.

¹⁰⁰ See C. Buckley, 'Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design,' *Design Issues*, 1986, vol. 3, no. 2, autumn 1986, pp. 3-14. There has been a good deal of focus by historians

on the anxieties generated by women working in male-dominated industries, such as munitions factories, but not vice-versa even if it was to a much lesser extent and smaller degree – see S. Alexander, ‘Men’s Fears and Women’s Employment: Responses to Unemployment in London Between the Wars,’ *Gender & History*, vol. 12, no. 2, July 2000, pp. 401-425.

¹⁰¹ R. Garland Thomson, ‘Seeing the Disabled: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography,’ in P. Longmore and L. Unmanský (eds), *The New Disability History*, New York University Press, New York, p. 337.

¹⁰² M. Hogarth, *Modern Embroidery*, 1933, p. 9.

¹⁰³ See Lady Smith-Dorrien, ‘On Teaching Convalescents,’ *Needlework in War-time*, vol. 8, Royal School of Needlework, London; and V. Cooper, ‘Embroidery and the Mental Patient,’ *Journal of the Association of Occupational Therapists*, vol. 3, no. 6, 1940, pp. 5-7.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Women Return to Needlework,’ *Daily Express*, 18 March 1926, ‘Beautiful Needlework,’ *Daily Mail*, 11 May 1927, DSEI Archive.

¹⁰⁵ G.B.H., ‘Embroideries by Disabled Soldiers,’ *The Queen*, 27 May 1931, DSEI Archive.

¹⁰⁶ C. Buckley, ‘On the Margins: Theorizing the History and Significance of Making and Designing Clothes at Home,’ *Journal of Design History*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1998, pp. 157-171.